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ABSTRACT

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Running head: LEGITIMATION IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Legitimation in Qualitative Research

Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie

Howard University

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Correspondence should be addressed to Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Department of Human Development and Psychoeducational Studies, School of Education, Howard University, 2441 Fourth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20059, or E-Mail: (tonyonwuegbuzie@aol.com).

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Abstract

Although, the importance of validity has long been accepted among quantitative researchers, this concept has been an issue of contention among qualitative researchers. Thus, the first purpose of the present paper is to provide a comprehensive discussion of the different ways that validity has been defined. Second, an argument is provided that in order to be taken seriously, the onus is on qualitative researchers to be accountable fully for their data collection, analysis, and interpretive methodologies. Moreover, it is argued that rigor in research is needed, and that qualitative researchers assess the truth value of their findings. This can be accomplished by re-framing the concept of validity in qualitative research, for example, by treating validity as an issue of choosing among rival interpretations and of examining and providing arguments for the relative credibility of competing knowledge claims, or by re-defining validity as having multi-faceted criteria. Finally, the *Qualitative Legitimation Model* is introduced, which attempts to integrate many of the types of validity identified by qualitative researchers.

A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Legitimation in Qualitative Research

The concept of validity traditionally has been associated with the quantitative research tradition. Indeed, validity historically came to the fore in the context of experimental research. In an experimental study, the independent variable is manipulated by the researcher, and its effect on the dependent variable is observed. As such, an experiment is considered valid to the extent that valid cause-effect relationships can be inferred, that is, if results obtained are due *only* to the manipulated independent variable (i.e., possess internal validity) and are generalizable to groups, environments, and contexts outside of the experimental settings (i.e., possess external validity) (Onwuegbuzie, in press). Thus, internal and external validity are regarded as the *sine qua non* of validity in quantitative research.

Campbell and Stanley (Campbell, 1957; Campbell & Stanley, 1963) are credited with providing the most authoritative source regarding threats to internal and external validity. Campbell and Stanley identified the following eight threats to internal validity: history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, differential selection of participants, mortality, and interaction effects (e.g., selection-maturation interaction) (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Additionally, building on the work of Campbell and Stanley, Smith and Glass (1987) classified threats to external validity into the following three areas: population validity (i.e., selection-treatment interaction), ecological validity (i.e., experimenter effects, multiple-treatment interference, reactive arrangements, time and treatment interaction, history and treatment interaction), and external validity of operations (i.e., specificity of variables, pretest sensitization).

Although, the importance of validity has long been accepted among quantitative researchers, this concept has been an issue of contention among qualitative researchers. At

the one end of the qualitative continuum are those (e.g., Miles & Huberman, 1984) who believe that validity for qualitative research should be defined the same way as for quantitative research. At the other end of the spectrum, many post-modernists (e.g., Wolcott, 1990) contend that validity represents a misnomer, on the basis that unequivocal determination of validity is not possible. According to this school of thought, social processes are ephemeral, interactive phenomena that are inextricably intertwined with the researchers' ways of identifying and interpreting them. As such, what exists in the social science world is mind-dependent; therefore, truth can only be a socially- and historically-conditioned agreement. Moreover, a popular definition of validity among relativists is that it represents whatever the community agrees it should represent. Unfortunately, such a definition is extremely vague, and as such does not provide adequate assistance to beginning qualitative researchers in general and graduate students in particular.

Thus, the first purpose of the present paper is to provide a comprehensive discussion of the different ways that validity has been defined, including the following: consensual validity, catalytic validity, ironic legitimation, paralogical legitimation, rhizomatic legitimation, voluptuous legitimation, communicative validity, action validity, investigation validity, descriptive validity, theoretical validity, interpretive validity, and evaluative validity (Denzin, 1994; Kvale, 1995; Lather, 1993; Maxwell, 1992, 1996). Second, an argument is provided that in order to be taken seriously, the onus is on qualitative researchers to be accountable fully for their data collection, analysis, and interpretive methodologies. Moreover, it is argued that rigor in research is needed, and that qualitative researchers assess the truth value of their findings. This can be accomplished by re-framing the concept of validity in qualitative research, for example, by treating validity as an issue of choosing among rival interpretations and of examining and

providing arguments for the relative credibility of competing knowledge claims, or by re-defining validity as having multi-faceted criteria. Finally, the *Qualitative Legitimation Model* is introduced, which attempts to integrate many of the types of validity identified by qualitative researchers.

Validity Orientations in the Qualitative Context

As noted by Denzin (1994), a crisis of legitimation prevails in qualitative research. According to Denzin, this crisis necessitates an answer to the question of how qualitative studies should be evaluated. Over the last few decades, within the social science field, four schools of thought have emerged with respect to the legitimation crisis. These schools of thought primarily have aligned themselves with positivists, post-positivists, post-stucturalists, or post-modernists.

Those who interpret validity in qualitative research, that is, according to positivist doctrine, apply the same criteria as are utilized in quantitative research. In particular, these proponents evaluate qualitative research with respect to internal validity and external validity. For example, Miles and Huberman (1984), who refer to themselves as "right-wing qualitative researchers" and "soft-nosed positivists" (p. 23), note that "internal validity issues [are] primary" (p. 22). In addition to internal and external validity, these individuals assess qualitative research with regard to reliability and objectivity. In short, the positivist view of validity in qualitative research is the belief that the same set of criteria be applied to all social science research, regardless of whether it represents quantitative or qualitative research.

Post-positivism, the second legitimation orientation in qualitative research, contends that a set of validity criteria unique to the qualitative paradigm should be incorporated. In reality, however, these criteria typically have represented positivist criteria modified for the qualitative research context. Specifically, these proponents assert that the validity of qualitative research

should be assessed vis-á-vis its capacity to generate theory, to be empirically based and scientifically credible, to produce generalizable findings, and to be internally reflexive inasmuch as the effects of the researcher and the research method on the findings are examined (Denzin, 1994).

The third perspective, post-structuralist, believes that a entirely new set of criteria need to be developed, criteria that are completely separate from positivist and post-positivist influence. According to Denzin (1994, p. 298), these criteria involve "stressing subjectivity, emotionality, feeling, and other antifoundational criteria." Denzin concluded that politics is an important driving force for framing validity. In this vein, Lather (1986) defines catalytic validity as the degree to which a given research study empowers and liberates a research community. Still within this framework, Lather (1993) described the following four types of validity: ironic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous legitimation. Ironic legitimation rests on the assumption that there are multiple realities of the same phenomenon such that the truth value of the research depends on its ability to reveal co-existing opposites. Paralogical legitimation represents that aspect of validity that reveals paradoxes. Rhizomatic legitimation, which stems from mapping and not merely from describing data. Voluptuous legitimation, also known as embodied validity or situated validity, is interpretive in nature. This form of legitimation assesses the extent to which the researcher's level of interpretation exceeds her/his knowledge base stemming from the data. In summary, Lather's (1993) four types of validity represent a framework for representing truth that rejects correspondence theories of truth (Newman & Benz, 1998).

The fourth legitimation orientation, post-modernist, questions whether criteria can exist for assessing qualitative research. According to this line of reasoning, the idea of assessing

qualitative research is "antithetical to the nature of this research and the world it attempts to study" (Denzin, 1994, p. 297). As such, they believe that validity and qualitative research represents an oxymoron. However, some post-modernists believe that criteria are needed, although they advocate criteria that are radically different than in quantitative research. For example, critical theorists believe that control over what to study, who to study, how to undertake the study, and the relationship of the researcher to the participant(s) is determined with respect to the power relations underlying society at large, unless steps are taken to ensure that research investigations are designed in a democratic manner. Thus, the goal of critical theorists is to "democratize" educational research (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). Further, feminist researchers contend that valid research is represented by those in which (a) the lived experiences of the participants being studied are portrayed, (b) participants are able to understand and to transform their subordinate experiences, © the discrepancy between the participants' descriptions of their experiences and the researcher's account is minimized, and (d) the researcher's prior theoretical and political commitments are allowed to be informed and transformed by the understanding that emerge from the participants' experiences (Roman & Apple, 1990).

Kvale (1995) also provided a post-modernist perspective of validity. Interestingly, Kvale termed his view of validity as representing "moderate post-modernism" or an "affirmative postmodernism" (p. 21). According to Kvale, knowledge emanating from qualitative research is the result of a social construction. Moreover, Kvale rejected the idea of universal truth, at the same time endorsing the possibility of specific local, personal, and community dimensions of truth, which have a focus on everyday life and local narrative. Kvale (1995) labels his validity constructs as investigation validity, communicative validity, and action validity.

Investigation validity is the quality of craftmanship, in which validity is the researcher's quality control. Accordingly, validity not only is a matter of the methods used, but also of the researcher's personality traits, including her or his ethicalness. In other words, rather than denoting some final outcome, validity is a verification process built into the research study with continual checks of trustworthiness, credibility, and plausibility. Apparently, each stage of the research process involves a specific aspect of validity. As such, the investigative concept of validity is inherent in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Kvale's investigation validity represents how theories are obtained from the data at hand, and how the researcher should begin to conceptualize the research topic. This form of validity implies that the extent to which theory is consistent with the research purpose and data indicates the degree of validity.

Kyle's communicative validity involves testing the validity of knowledge claims in a discourse. In other words, validity is agreed upon by the collection of researchers. Kvale asserted that "a construct and its measurement are validated when the discourse about their relationship is persuasive to the community of researchers" (p. 22). Finally, with respect to Kvale's action validity, justification of the validity of the research is based on whether or not it works--that is, whether or not the research findings are used by decision makers and other stakeholders. In summary, then, Kvale's three-dimensional conceptualization of validity represents questioning, theorizing, and checking.

At the most extreme end of the post-modernist school of thought lie constructivists such as Wolcott (1990), who question whether validity is appropriate, legitimate, or useful in qualitative studies. Moreover, Wolcott declared that validity does not capture the essence of what he seeks and, as such, "validity neither guides nor informs" his research (p. 136). For Wolcott, validity interferes with his goal of understanding the underlying phenomenon. However,

Wolcott does not dismiss validity outright, but rather places it in a more general perspective. Specifically, Wolcott seeks to identify "critical elements" and write "plausible interpretations from them" (p. 146). According to Wolcott, understanding is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than is validity. Consequently, he attempts to understand what is occurring rather than to convince his audience.

Quest to Establish Legitimacy

According to Eisenhart and Howe (1992), the following three major responses arose from the quest to establish legitimacy in qualitative research: (a) adoptions of the conventional approach, (b) alternatives to the conventional approach, and © eclecticism. As noted above, some qualitative researchers adopted the conventional approach, namely, the positivist or empiricist conceptualization of internal and external validity. For example, Denzin (1989), who compared seven research methodologies (i.e., experiments, surveys, participants observations, unobtrusive methods, life histories, interviewing, and filming), utilized Campbell's (1963a, 1963b) eight threats to internal validity and four threats to external validity as a basis for comparison. Denzin showed that each of these designs had relative strengths and weaknesses with respect to minimizing threats to internal and external validity, with experiments and participant observation being rated as representing the most robust designs. However, Denzin noted that minimizing the threats to validity is not undertaken in the same manner in each research design.

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) also framed validity in qualitative research in terms of the conventional threats to internal and external validity, as well as with respect to construct validity. Goetz and LeCompte asserted that attributes of a good qualitative research include completeness, appropriateness, clarity, comprehensiveness of scope, credibility, and

significance. However, whereas Denzin (1989) considered how various designs, when used together within the same framework, meet the requirements of the conventional approach. Goetz and LeCompte incorporated the conventional meanings of validity into qualitative vernacular (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992).

The second response to the challenge of validity in qualitative research under Eisenhart and Howe's model represented alternatives to the conventional (positivist) conception of validity. This position was characterized by extreme skepticism (e.g., Erickson, 1986) or outright refutation (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the claim that the conventional conception of validity can be applied to qualitative research methods. Erickson (1986, p. 119) asserted that the "basic validity criterion" of qualitative research is "*the immediate and local meanings of actions*, as defined from the actors' point of view" [italics in original]. According to Erickson, the vital aspect of validity in ethnographic studies is the manner in which the story is told and evidence for its authenticity is provided. Erickson also maintained that legitimation in qualitative research also pertains to how the findings will be understood and used by various audiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) took an even more extreme position with respect to standards in qualitative research, advocating the development of an entirely different set of standards than that used by quantitative researchers. Lincoln and Guba's position is similar to that of Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991), who asserted that using quantitative vernacular tends to be a defensive measure that results in holding quantitative research as a standard by which qualitative research is evaluated. Lincoln and Guba concluded that meeting the standards involves (a) conducting qualitative research in such a way as to increase the likelihood that the categories pertaining to the participants rather than to the researcher will prevail, and (b) having participants approve the researchers' interpretations. These theorists

also advocate the use of persistent observation, prolonged engagement, and triangulation as methods of assessing trustworthiness of data. Lincoln and Guba refer to four types of trustworthiness of qualitative research, which, ironically, are analogous to Campbell and Stanley's (1963) major concepts. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba's elements of trustworthiness, namely, truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, are similar to Campbell and Stanley's concepts of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). Other language used by Lincoln and Guba to reclaim ordinary language terms to discuss validity in qualitative research includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Again, however, these concepts are parallel to the concepts of internal validity, reliability, objectivity, and external validity, respectively, advanced by quantitative researchers.

Rather than using the term validity, Eisner (1991) discussed the credibility of qualitative research. He outlined standards such as structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy. In structural corroboration, the qualitative researcher utilizes multiple types of data to support or to contradict the interpretation. He terms this form of triangulation as "confluence of evidence" (p. 110). Consensual validation stems from the opinion of others, with "an agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, and evaluation and thematics of an educational situation are right" (p. 112). Finally, referential adequacy suggests the importance of criticism. According to Eisner, the goal of criticism is to highlight the subject matter, from which a more complex level of *verhesten* prevails.

The third and final response to the challenge of validity in qualitative research under Eisenhart and Howe's model represented what they termed as eclecticism. This form of criteria incorporates ideas stemming from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives of validity.

Eclectics believe that criteria are generally applicable to all research designs. As such, this form of legitimation is the most inclusive. An example of an eclectic conceptualization of validity is Maxwell (1992), who identified five types of validity, which he labeled as descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the account as documented by the researcher. As noted by Johnson (1999), the key questions addressed in descriptive validity include: Did what was reported as occurring in the group being studied actually take place? and Did the investigators accurately report what they observed, saw, and heard? That is, descriptive validity refers to the accuracy in reporting descriptive information (e.g., description of peoples, objects, events, behaviors, settings, laces, and time). According to Maxwell (1992), descriptive validity can refer to both errors of omission and commission. Descriptive validity also can relate to statistically descriptive aspects of accounts (Maxwell, 1992).

Interpretive validity refers to the extent to which a researcher's interpretation of an account represents an understanding of the perspective of the group under study and the meanings attached to their words and actions. In other words, interpretative validity pertains to the degree to which research participants' voices (e.g., viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, feelings, intentions, experiences, and actions) are accurately understood by the researcher and delineated in the research article. Understanding participants' inner (i.e., phenomenological) worlds is central to interpretive validity, which refers to the accuracy in presenting these inner worlds (Johnson, 1999). Theoretical validity represents the degree to which a theoretical explanation developed from research findings fits the data, and thus, is credible, trustworthy, and defensible (Johnson, 1999). According to Maxwell (1996), this is the most serious threat to validity. Apparently, threats to theoretical validity occur when a researcher does not collect or

pay attention to discrepant data, or not considering rival explanations or understandings of the underlying phenomena (Maxwell, 1996).

Generalizabilty, the fourth type of validity described by Maxwell (1992), refers to the extent to which a researcher can generalize the account of a particular situation or population to other individuals, times, settings, or context. Maxwell differentiates internal generalizability from external generalizability. The former (i.e., internal generalizability) refers to generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied, whereas, the latter (i.e., external generalizability) pertains to the generalizability beyond the group, setting, time, or context. According to Maxwell, internal generalizability typically is more important to qualitative researchers than is external generalizability. Finally, evaluative validity refers to the extent to which an evaluation framework can be applied to the objects of study, rather than a descriptive, interpretive, or explanatory one (Maxwell, 1992).

Interestingly, Eisenhart and Howe (1992) criticize all three approaches to validity (i.e., adaptation of the conventional approach, alternatives, eclecticism) inasmuch as they promote the belief either that all research, regardless of paradigm, must be evaluated with respect to the same criterion (adaptation) or that there must be different types of validity (alternatives, eclecticism). Rather, Eisenhart and Howe (1992, p. 656) advocate a unitary concept of validity with "different design-specific instances." Moreover, these theorists conceptualize five general standards for conducting educational research that are pertinent for all research designs. Specifically, these five standards are (a) there is an appropriate match among research questions, data collection techniques, and analytical methods; (b) the application of specific data collection and analysis methods are appropriate and effective; © the research is coherent with respect to previous work; (d) the research represents important and ethical work; and (e)

the research is comprehensive.

With the exception of a few qualitative researchers such as Wolcott (1990), who question whether validity is appropriate or useful in qualitative studies, the majority of interpretivists accept the legitimacy of the concept of validity. In fact, it appears that a reason for the rejection of validity by some qualitative researchers stems from their perceptions that the positivist framework (i.e., correspondence of truth) of validity often is utilized as the standard against which all other standards are conceptualized and assessed. Consequently, they believe that in order to reject positivism, they must reject validity. However, this should not be the case.

Indeed, as noted by Constas (1992, p. 255), unless methods for examining rival hypotheses in qualitative research are developed, "the research community will be entitled to question the analytical rigor of qualitative research"--where rigor is defined as the attempt to make data and categorical schemes as public and as replicable as possible (Denzin, 1978a, 1978b).

Unfortunately, too many qualitative researchers adopt an "anything goes" relativist attitude, thereby not paying due attention to providing an adequate rationale for interpretations of their data. For example, many qualitative researchers do not sufficiently document how they identify emergent themes. Yet, if there cannot be standards (i.e., validity) for qualitative research, then how is it that editors of qualitative journals such as *Qualitative Studies in Education* can determine which studies are published? Surely, editors use criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research articles? Thus, it is clear that rigor in research is needed, regardless of whether quantitative or qualitative research techniques are utilized. With respect to the latter, it is important that qualitative researchers assess the truth value of their findings. This can be accomplished by re-framing the concept of validity in qualitative research, for

example, by treating validity as an issue of choosing among rival interpretations and of examining and providing arguments for the relative credibility of competing knowledge claims (Polkinghorne, 1983), or by re-defining validity as having multi-faceted criteria (e.g., credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Framework for Establishing Design-Specific Legitimacy in Qualitative Research

As documented above, validity in qualitative research has been operationalized in a myriad of ways. To date, no one definition of validity represents a hegemony in qualitative research. In fact, it appears that all the conceptualizations of validity presented above are appropriate at least for some qualitative research designs. As such, each of these models appear to have merit. This provides support for Eisenhart and Howe's (1992) contention of a unitary concept of validity with different design-specific conditions.

Surmising that threats to internal and external validity at the three major stages of the research process (i.e., research design/data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation), Onwuegbuzie (in press) developed a model that expanded Campbell and Stanley's (Campbell, 1957, 1963a, 1963a; Campbell & Stanley, 1963) threats to internal and external validity. However, although in any particular quantitative research study, the research design/data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation stages typically represent three distinct (linear) phases, this is not the case in qualitative research inquiries. Indeed, in hermeneutic research, these three stages are iterative. In other words, in interpretive studies, the research design/data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation stages are recursive, and, thus, non-linear in nature. Therefore any conceptualization of validity in qualitative research should take into account this iterative feature.

Figure 1 represents the *Qualitative Legitimation Model*, which attempts to integrate the

types of validity identified above, as well as threats adopted from Onwuegbuzie's (in press) model. The Qualitative Legitimation Model comprises threats to internal credibility and external credibility. Internal credibility can be defined as the truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, dependability, and/or credibility of interpretations and conclusions within the underlying setting or group. Internal credibility corresponds to what Onwuegbuzie (in press) termed as internal replication in quantitative research. On the other hand, external credibility refers to the degree that the findings of a study can be generalized across different populations of persons, settings, contexts, and times. That is, external credibility pertains to the confirmability and transferability of findings and conclusions. All threats identified in the Qualitative Legitimation Model are classified either as threats to internal credibility, external credibility, or both.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Threats to Internal Credibility in Qualitative Research

As illustrated in Figure 1, the following threats to internal credibility are pertinent to qualitative research: ironic legitimation, paralogical legitimation, rhizomatic legitimation, voluptuous (i.e., embodied) legitimation, descriptive validity, structural corroboration, theoretical validity, observational bias, researcher bias, reactivity, confirmation bias, illusory correlation, causal error, and effect size. The first seven sources of legitimation have been described above. The remainder, namely, those adopted from Onwuegbuzie's (in press) model, are described below.

Observational bias. Observational bias arises at the research design/data collection

stage when the data collectors have obtained an insufficient sampling of behaviors or words from the study participant(s) (Onwuegbuzie, in press). Apparently, such inadequate sampling of behaviors occurs if either persistent observation or prolonged engagement does not prevail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Observational bias also can occur at the data analysis stage, if an insufficient sample of behaviors or words is analyzed from the underlying data.

Researcher bias. According to Onwuegbuzie (in press), researcher bias occurs when the researcher has personal biases or *a priori* assumptions that he/she is unable to bracket. This bias may be subconsciously transferred to the participants in such a way that their behavior, attitudes, or experiences are affected. In addition to unduly influencing participants, the researcher could affect study procedures (e.g., ask leading questions in an interview) or even contaminate data collection techniques. Researcher bias does not only occur at the data collection stage, it can also prevail at the data analysis and data interpretation phases. Researcher bias is a very common threat to legitimation in constructivist research because the researcher usually serves as the person collecting the data.

As noted by Onwuegbuzie (in press), researcher bias can be either *active* or *passive*. Passive sources include personality characteristics or attributes of the researcher (e.g., gender, ethnicity, type of clothing worn), whereas active sources may include mannerisms and statements made by the researcher that provide the participants with information about researcher's preferences. Another form of researcher bias is when the researcher's prior knowledge of the participants unduly influences the participants' behaviors.

Reactivity. Reactivity refers to a number of facets related to the way in which a study is undertaken and the reactions of the participants involved (Onwuegbuzie, in press). That is, reactivity involves changes in persons' responses that result from being cognizant of the fact

that one is participating in a research investigation. For example, the mere presence of observers during a study may alter the typical responses of the group that provide rival explanations for the findings, which, in turn, threaten internal credibility at the data collection stage.

Onwuegbuzie (in press) identified the following five major components of reactivity: (a) the *Hawthorne effect*, (b) the *John Henry effect*, © *resentful demoralization*, (d) the *novelty effect*, and (e) the *placebo effect*. However, only the Hawthorne effect and the novelty effect are pertinent to qualitative investigations. The Hawthorne effect pertains to when individuals interpret their receiving an intervention as being given *special* consideration. As such, their reaction to this perception makes it difficult to isolate naturally-occurring observations from contrived situations. Similarly, the novelty effect, refers to artificial responses on the part of study participants merely because a novel stimuli is introduced into the environment solely for the purpose of collecting data (e.g., a video camera).

Confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is the tendency for interpretations and conclusions based on new data to be overly congruent with *a priori* hypotheses (Greenwald, Pratkanis, Leippe, & Baumgardner, 1986). As noted by Onwuegbuzie (in press), confirmation bias, per se, does not necessarily pose a threat to internal credibility. It threatens internal credibility at the data interpretation stage only when there exists at least one plausible rival explanations to underlying findings that might be demonstrated to be superior if given the opportunity.

Illusory correlation. The illusory correlation represents a tendency to identify a relationship among events, people, and the like, when no such relationships actually prevails. The illusory correlation may arise from a *false consensus bias*, in which researchers have the false belief that most other individuals share their interpretations of a relationship

(Onwuegbuzie, in press). Such an illusory correlation poses a serious threat to internal credibility at the data interpretation stage.

Causal error. Like quantitative researchers, qualitative investigators often provide causal explanations and attributions for observed behaviors and attitudes without attempting to verify such interpretations.

Effect size. As observed by Onwuegbuzie (2001), when conducting thematic analyses, qualitative analysts usually only classify and describe emergent themes. Although identification of themes represents an extremely powerful way of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994), even more information from these themes often can be derived by determining the frequency of occurrence (e.g., most/least dominant theme) and/or intensity of each identified theme. That is, the incidence of each theme can be quantified or, in the vernacular of Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), *quantitized*.

Onwuegbuzie (2001) contended that there are many situations in which effect sizes would provide a thicker description of underlying qualitative data. Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (in press) posited that failure to utilize effect sizes by interpretivists arises from linking effect sizes to the quantitative paradigm. Yet, the use of effect sizes actually *qualitizes* empirical data by helping data analysts to determine the meaningfulness of behavior and words, conclusions that are based on *qualitative* categorizations (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, in press).

Threats to External Credibility in Qualitative Research

As illustrated in Figure 1, the following threats to external credibility are pertinent to qualitative research: catalytic validity, communicative validity, action validity, investigation validity, interpretive validity, evaluative validity, consensual validity, population generalizability, ecological generalizability, temporal generalizability, researcher bias, reactivity, order bias, and

effect size. The first seven sources of legitimation have been described above. The remainder, namely, those adopted from Onwuegbuzie's (in press) model, are described below.

Population generalizability/Ecological generalizability/Temporal generalizability. Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (in press) surmised that a common errors among qualitative researchers that is made at the interpretation stage is the tendency to generalize findings rather than to utilize the qualitative data to obtain insights into particular underlying processes and practices that prevail within a specific location (Connolly, 1998). Indeed, only when relatively large representative samples are utilized should qualitative researchers attempt to generalize findings across different populations, locations, settings, times, and contexts.

Researcher bias. Researcher bias, as described above, threatens external credibility of the findings because the particular type of bias of the researcher may be so unique as to make the interpretations ungeneralizable.

Reactivity. Reactivity (i.e., Hawthorne effect, novelty effect), as described above, poses a threat to external credibility because it is not clear whether the observed findings would be the same if this threat had not prevailed, thereby threatening the generalizability of the results.

Order bias. Order bias occurs, for example, when the order questions are posed in an interview schedule or the order in which observations are made makes a difference to the truth dependability and confirmability of the findings. In such cases, interpretations cannot be confidently generalized to situations outside the study context.

Effect size. As described above, failure to consider the effect size or the meaningfulness of an interpretation poses a threat to external credibility.

Conclusions

Miles and Huberman (1994) note that

> Qualitative studies take place in a real social world, and can have real consequences in people's lives; that there is a reasonable view of "what happened" in any particular situation (including what was believed, interpreted, etc.); and that we who render accounts of it can do so well or poorly, and should not consider our work unjudgable. (p. 277)

This is the position that underlies the present paper. In fact, in outlining the Qualitative Legitimation Model, the goal is to facilitate the sharing of standards, as is recommended by a growing number of qualitative theorists (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Williams, 1986). As noted by Maxwell (1992), use of legitimation frameworks, such as the Qualitative Legitimation Model,

> does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exists ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself, but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about. (p. 283)

Although Qualitative Legitimation Model is relatively comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive. Indeed, interpretivists are encouraged to find ways to improve upon this framework. Moreover, it should be noted that in any particular qualitative study, not all of the threats contained in the model will be pertinent. Unlike in quantitative research, where the goal is to minimize all sources of invalidity, different validity components of the Qualitative Legitimation Model will be relevant in different qualitative studies. As such, the Qualitative Legitimation Model is extremely flexible. Indeed, as other threats to legitimation in qualitative research are conceptualized, these can be added to the Qualitative Legitimation Model.

In any case, it is hoped that this paper makes it clear that in *every* qualitative inquiry,

findings, interpretations, and conclusions should be assessed for truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, dependability, credibility, confirmability, transferability, generalizability, or the like. Further, legitimacy should not only be undertaken, but documented and delineated in the final research report, so that qualitative research can be made public, instead of the private status that it tends to have (Constas, 1992). Future editions of the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual* (APA, 1994) can play an important role here by providing *strong* encouragement for interpretivists to document how they obtained their data, their interpretations, and their conclusions. Journal reviewers and editors of qualitative research journals also can make an impact here by setting minimum standards of rigor, communication, and ways of working toward consensus (Lincoln, 1995). Utilizing and documenting legitimation techniques should prevent *validity* and *qualitative research* from being seen as an oxymoron, especially by beginning qualitative researchers.

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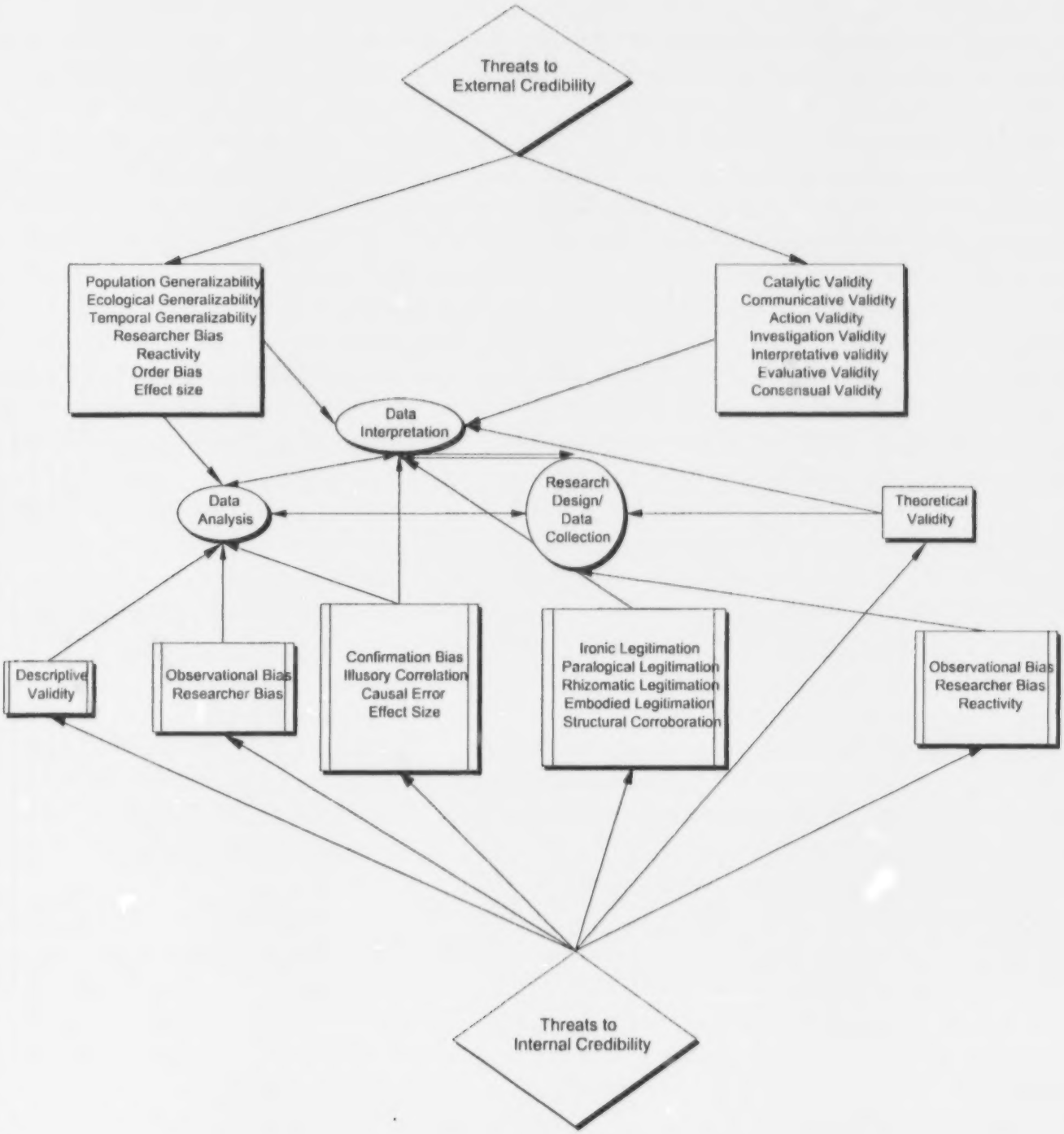
Figure 1: Qualitative Legitimation Model



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